# Awards for Women Fall Short

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The Association for Women in Science (AWIS) undertook the AWARDS project in cooperation with the ASA, American Mathematical Society, Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics, Mathematical Association of America, American Chemical Society, American Geophysical Union, and Society for Neuroscience (SfN).

In late June, AWARDS personnel and representatives of the societies met in Washington, DC, for a workshop designed to raise awareness of and create solutions for the under-representation of women among award recipients presented by the organizations involved. Specifically, the goals of the workshop were "to develop processes customized for each organization that foster the diversity of scientific award recipients" and to use the lessons learned to formulate best practices for other disciplinary societies.

Measuring against percentage of PhDs going to women from 1971–2000, the percentage of scholarly awards going to women fell short in all of the societies (except the relatively new SfN). In awards for service, the situation was reversed or close to reversed in all the societies except the ASA, where women are still substantially under-represented.

Even conceding that there are problems with the data, the overall trend was clear: Either women are not worthy of recognition or they are being overlooked. A 2007 National Academy of Sciences report claimed, "It is not lack of talent, but unintentional biases and outmoded institutional structures that are hindering the access and advancement of women."

How do we address the situation? Enlarging the pool of nominees by making certain the accomplishments of women are not ignored is a basic practice that the societies were encouraged to undertake. On the other hand, the data show that even when the percentage of women nominees was substantial, the success rate for women was not very high, particularly when the award in question was given to a single recipient.

Part of the explanation offered for the lack of diversity was that there was no general coordination of multiple awards committees. The ASA, however, recently formed the Council on Awards to exercise some oversight of the process.

Examples from the literature were cited, showing that the same work was evaluated differently if the author's name was female, that bias is apparent in the language used in letters of recommendation for women, and that there are pervasive differences in compensation and other institutional resources for women. Several effective demonstrations of implicit association bias also were provided. A number of actions were proposed as an antidote to the effects of implicit bias, including stressing the benefits of diversity, citing research on the advantages of heterogeneous brainstorming groups and diverging viewpoints, and mentioning that we cannot afford to lose a significant proportion of those capable of excellence in science.

For more information about AWARDS, visit *www.amstat.org/committees/cowis.* ■